Health Information Exchange: Making Sure Health Information is Available When and Where It's Needed

Outreach Materials

Provided By:

The National Learning Consortium (NLC)

Developed By:

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
State Health Information Exchange Program

NATIONAL LEARNING CONSORTIUM

The National Learning Consortium (NLC) is a virtual and evolving body of knowledge and resources designed to support healthcare providers and health IT professionals working towards the implementation, adoption and meaningful use of certified EHR systems.

The NLC represents the collective EHR implementation experiences and knowledge gained directly from the field of ONC's outreach programs (REC, Beacon, State HIE) and through the Health Information Technology Research Center (HITRC) Communities of Practice (CoPs).

The following resource can be used in support of the EHR Implementation Lifecycle. It is recommended by "boots-on-the-ground" professionals for use by others who have made the commitment to implement or upgrade to certified EHR systems.

EHR Implementation Lifecycle

1 Assess Your Practice Readiness
2 Plan Your Approach
3 Select or Upgrade to a Certified EHR
4 Conduct Training & Implement an EHR System
5 Achieve Meaningful Use
6 Continue Quality Improvement

DESCRIPTION & INSTRUCTIONS

The 'Exchange 101: Introduction to Direct Adoption and Implementation' outreach materials are intended to aid providers and health IT implementers with EHR Implementation Step 5: Achieve Meaningful Use. The collection of outreach materials can be used to educate different audiences about health information exchange using the Direct solution in support of implementing care coordination meaningful use objectives.

This specific resource includes an overview on the benefits of health information exchange and information on how consumers can participate in health information exchange.
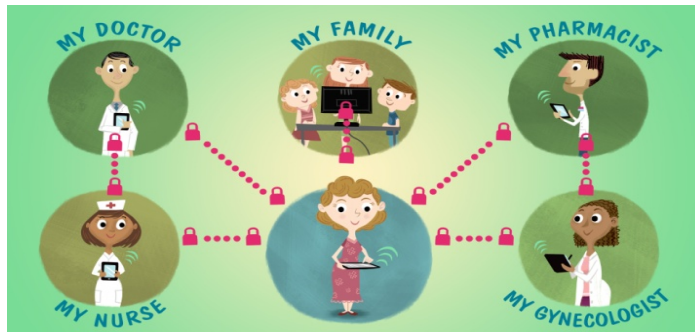
Distribute these materials to the appropriate audiences to educate them about using Direct for health information exchange.

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Benefits of health information exchange

The exchange of health information—like a summary of a patient's recent doctor's visit, lab test result, or medication history—between health care professionals can make sure everyone who is caring for a patient is on the same page. For example, if Dr. Smith refers his patient to a specialist, his office staff could send the patient's results, medical history, and notes to the specialist so when the patient arrives, he or she does not have to endure retelling medical information or endure unnecessary or duplicative tests.

Under federal law, patients can request access to their health records (in an electronic format if it's available that way) and download and transmit that information to where it needs to go. For example, a patient who moves can send their health record to their new doctor.

Direct messaging: A secure way to send health information

Direct messaging is a way to send health information so that it's only accessible by the intended recipient. It establishes a secure communication channel between health care professionals and can also be used for communications between clinicians and patients. Using direct messaging, health care professionals can exchange information about a treatment plan, diagnosis, or laboratory test result with other clinicians or with their patients. In turn, patients can use direct messaging to email their health care providers with questions or to send information about health indicators monitored at home, such as blood pressure or weight.

KEY TERMS

Electronic Health Record (EHR): Many physicians use an electronic health record (EHR) system to document information about their patients and manage certain office processes, from intake to diagnosis, treatment, and discharge. EHRs can be used to generate reminders about scheduling appointments, following up with prescription refills, or checking for test results.

Health Information Exchange (HIE): Health care professionals—such as your physician, local pharmacist, or lab technician—often need to exchange information relevant to your care, via a timely, secure and reliable network. Electronic health information exchange (HIE) is faster, more accurate and more complete than communication by telephone, fax or paper. Using simple, inexpensive methods for HIE, health care professionals can send and receive patient information like test results, care summaries, and medication histories to other known and trusted providers in their network.

Personal Health Record (PHR): To be better informed and more engaged in important decisions about their health, patients need access to their clinical information. An online electronic health record that is maintained by and fully available to a patient, commonly called a personal health record (PHR), can help meet this need. Patients can save their lab results, care summaries, and medication histories in a PHR, then use health information exchange to forward this information to their health care professional to help them make more informed decisions.

Increasingly, patients have begun to use Personal Health Records to track the history of their diagnoses, treatments, medications, or test results. Direct messaging can help to populate this information into a patient portal or a patient's PHR so the patient doesn't have to enter the information themselves.

Facilitate referrals and coordinate care

Compared to phone calls and faxes, direct messaging enables more seamless referrals between providers and safe transitions for patients—from doctor-to-doctor or hospital-to-home. Health care providers can exchange referral and payer forms, along with care summaries, medication lists, and lab results with the referring or consulting provider in advance of their encounter with the patient. These documents can be exchanged immediately in the form of electronic attachments to a Direct message, eliminating the need for courier or patient transport of records, thereby reducing the risk of lost documents and incomplete or inaccurate information. With the test results and diagnosis in hand, health professionals are better equipped to diagnose and treat the patient.

> **THE EHR MEANINGFUL USE INCENTIVE PAYMENT PROGRAM**
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> This program, created by the HITECH Act and maintained by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, provides financial incentives to eligible physicians and hospitals to adopt health information technology, including use of electronic health records and participation in health information exchange. To qualify for these incentives, health care providers must also agree to provide health information in electronic format to the patient, including a copy that can be stored in a patient's PHR. Providers must also be willing to electronically communicate with patients and must record the patient's preferred method of communication in their organization's electronic health record.

How can I participate in health information exchange?

The federal government incentivizes providers to adopt and use electronic health records (EHRs) to exchange health information through the EHR Meaningful Use Incentive Program. More than half of physicians have begun using electronic health records systems. Patients and their families can encourage their health care providers to adopt EHRs and to exchange health information electronically by:

- Asking their health care providers if they use an EHR
  - Requesting that their providers provide a way for them to electronically access their health information online. Under federal law, you have a right to get a copy of your health information in an electronic format, if it's available that way.

For more information about Health Information Technology, visit www.HealthIT.gov